Gun Deaths Outpace Motor Vehicle Deaths in 34 States and the District of Columbia in 2020
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This study was authored by VPC Senior Policy Analyst Marty Langley.

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GUN DEATHS OUTPACED MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS IN 34 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA IN 2020

In 2020, firearm fatalities exceeded motor vehicle fatalities in 34 states and the District of Columbia, the most recent year for which state-level data is available for both products from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.¹ That year, gun deaths (including gun suicide, homicide, and fatal unintentional shootings) outpaced motor vehicle deaths in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. In just over a decade, the number of states plus the District of Columbia where gun deaths exceed motor vehicle deaths has increased from just 13 in 2010 to 35 in 2020—a jump of 169 percent.

IN 2010, GUN DEATHS EXCEEDED MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS IN ONLY 12 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

2010 Gun Deaths and Motor Vehicle Deaths by State²

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¹ Source: WISQARS database, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
² In 2010 there were 31,672 gun deaths nationwide for a rate of 10.26 per 100,000 and 35,498 motor vehicle deaths (both occupant and pedestrian) nationwide for a rate of 11.50 per 100,000. Source: WISQARS database, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
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BY 2020, GUN DEATHS EXCEEDED MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS IN 34 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

2020 Gun Deaths and Motor Vehicle Deaths by State

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<th>State</th>
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<th>Motor Vehicle Death Rate</th>
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**STATES PLUS THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WITH MORE GUN DEATHS THAN MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS**

![Graph showing states and years with more gun deaths than motor vehicle deaths](image)
These numbers are all the more shocking when one stops to think about the average American’s exposure to motor vehicles as opposed to firearms. Nine out of 10 American households have access to a motor vehicle⁴ while approximately four out of 10 American households contain a gun.⁵

As Dr. David Hemenway, director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center, noted in his 2004 book Private Guns, Public Health: “[T]he time Americans spend using their cars is orders of magnitudes greater than the time spent using their guns. It is probable that per hour of exposure, guns are far more dangerous. Moreover, we have lots of safety regulations concerning the manufacture of motor vehicles; there are virtually no safety regulations for domestic firearms manufacture.”⁶

**CONCLUSION**

Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia already experience gun death rates that exceed their motor vehicle death rates. Gun death and injury is an accelerating public health crisis fueled by an unregulated industry that works to develop increasingly lethal firearms and ammunition. It then touts this firepower in its marketing efforts. As with motor vehicles, until the gun industry is held accountable for the harm caused by its products only limited progress can be made to reduce firearms death and injury. Such measures would include comprehensive health and safety regulation of the firearms industry and repeal of the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA).

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⁵ According to the Pew Research Center, “Four-in-ten U.S. adults report that there is a gun in their household: Three-in-ten say they personally own a gun, while 11% say that they don’t own a gun, but someone else in their household does.” [Wide differences on most gun policies between gun owners and non-owners, but also some agreement](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/04/wide-differences-on-most-gun-policies-between-gun-owners-and-non-owners-but-also-some-agreement/).
